

4701 WILLARD AVENUE, CHEVY CHASE, MARYLAND 20015 656-4068

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SUBJECT Senator Frank Church

FRANK REYNOLDS: One of the most influential figures in Washington at any time is the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Right now that position is held by Frank Church of Idaho, who happens to be running for reelection and also happens to be a special target of a well-organized, well-financed, and extraordinary campaign to defeat him.

Katherine Mackin has this report on the tactics and techniques of those opposed to Church.

KATHERINE MACKIN: A television ad, empty missile silos, and a voice says...

MAN: You see, Senator Church has almost always opposed a strong national defense.

MACKIN: The implication is clear, but the fact is the missiles were retired by the Air Force, and Church's opponents had to withdraw this ad. But the ad and its theme, if Frank Church wins, you lose, are the tone of the Idaho Senate campaign.

Frank Church, liberal, under fierce attack by right wing conservatives, is struggling for reelection and running on three fronts. Against Libertarian candidate Larry Fulmer, against Representative Steve Symms, his chief opponent, who served eight years in Congress, is one of its most conservative members. And against Symms' most ardent supporters, an outfit called ABC, Anyone But Church, architects of the gut-level campaign inside the state, but guided and kept financially afloat from outside by NCPAC, the National Conservative Political Action Committee, based in Virginia, rich in money, and dedicated to doing in the nation's liberals, even its director Terry

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Doland says if that means using what Church calls the politics of fear.

TERRY DOLAN: I don't think there's anything wrong with fear. I don't think there's anything wrong with talking about the record of a liberal senator like Frank Church, who I think has put this country in jeopardy.

SENATOR FRANK CHURCH: But if it works here and in some of the other targeted states, then it will spread out to infect politics through the entire country.

DOLAN: I'm convinced that at some point with these types of programs you could elect Mickey Mouse to the House or the Senate.

MACKIN: For his part, Symms has never repudiated NCPAC for its tactics, saying Church's complaining about it is itself political.

REPRESENTATIVE STEVE SYMMS: So I think that he's the one that's diverting the attention and uses them to as a strawman.

MACKIN: But Symms, travelling around Idaho with the state's conservative Senator James McClure, proved no slouch himself at gut-level politics. After a speech at this rally, Symms, wearing a wireless microphone, could be heard in the audience staging a question damaging to Church.

REP. SYMMS: If they open this up to questions, ask McClure that question [words unintelligible]. Get him out there.

MACKIN: The man complied, asking whether Church was responsible for weakening the Central Intelligence Agency in the congressional investigation Church led.

Symms, in a good guy-bad guy routine, acted unaware the question would be asked and called on McClure to answer it.

REP. SYMMS: I'd rather see Jim McClure answer that question than me. He was in the Senate when the CIA things went on.

Would you care that, Jim?

I think he played a big role in it personally, but...

MACKIN: McClure then seemed to imply Church was responsible for the death of CIA agent Richard Welch killed five years ago in Greece.

SENATOR JAMES McCLURE: And this man who was the head of the CIA said it isn't so much what Church is saying, even the fact that he's naming our agents or saying that what we've done is wrong. He called the CIA a rogue elephant running wild. He said, but what he's doing is emboldening the enemies of the United States, and he's going to get some of our people killed. Two weeks later that man was dead. The man I was talking to had been assassinated. He had forecast his own death.

MACKIN: But Church also had some help, importing Senator Henry Jackson, who went after Church's right wing critics, throwing up his hands at one point, declaring that even he, a hawk, is under attack by the right.

SENATOR HENRY JACKSON: You know, I think there're just millions of Republicans and Democrats and Independents that are fed up with this trash. You know, here I have to go around and defend my record on national defense because some lunatics are running loose.

MACKIN: To survive this election Senator Church has a most difficult balancing act. How to get by the assault of those right-wing organizations that are helping Congressman Symms, how to make up for the lead that Ronald Reagan is said to have over Jimmy Carter here Idaho, and how to overcome the genuine conservative tide that is sweeping all across this state. It won't be easy.

Katherine Mackin, ABC News, Bogus Basin, Idaho.